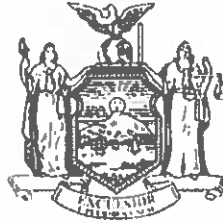


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JOINT SENATE TASK FORCE ON OPIOIDS,
ADDICTION AND OVERDOSE PREVENTION

THE SENATE
STATE OF NEW YORK



MICHELLE HINCHEY
Senator, 41ST District

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As the Kingston Rent Guideline Board gathers for a vote to set rental adjustments for apartments under the Emergency Tenant and Protection Act (ETPA), I strongly urge the Board to approve a 0% rental adjustment. This will be critical to protecting tenants and providing local people and families with some stability as we continue to take steps to address a housing crisis that has spiraled out of control.

In the City of Kingston, where the average rent has doubled since 2015, and local wages are drastically misaligned with these unforeseen increases, renters are facing unprecedented financial hardships, along with a 1.57% vacancy rate and the extreme proliferation of short-term rentals that have made finding an affordable place to live impossible. With the poverty rate in Kingston nearly 50 percent higher than the U.S. average, our residents are at a very real and severe risk of being displaced amid the interlocking housing shortage and affordability crises.

We need our local housing costs to keep pace with local wages and take into account the skyrocketing cost of living — not encumber our community members to the point of displacement. We want to keep people living in their homes and communities, and managing local housing costs in a way that recognizes the current housing landscape is a critically important action.

I thank Board members for taking this testimony under consideration and urge that members think critically about setting rental adjustments in a way that will best serve the needs of our community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Michelle Hinchey'.

Michelle Hinchey
New York State Senator, District 41

Andrew and Julie Stavropoulos
6/15/2023

Re: Kingston Rent Guidelines Board June 17, 2023 Public Hearing
Dear Board Members,

I would be present for the Kingston RGB public hearing as I was on October 25, 2022, but it is my son's graduation. Small landlords who don't have employees face these important decisions all the time. I was called out this past Christmas to my property and New Year's Eve 2021. I am always on call.

As far as expenses go we have seen everything more than double from cosmetic items like floor paint going from \$34 to \$75 per gallon in 3 years to an electrical service on my personal residence costing \$1200 in an initial 2014 quote to recently paying \$3065 for the same work.

I have spent a lot of time trying to understand why all landlords are grouped together and then vilified by being called slumlords and greedy. It finally made sense when I realized that no one is cordial when they are stealing from you. I don't understand some individuals taking a victory lap when the City of Kingston opted into ETPA. No additional units have been created by this action, which is truly the only housing solution. This is only going to hurt small honest landlords like my wife and I. Below are some examples including a letter from a previous tenant when he moved out in 2014.

In September 2010 my tenant called me to let me know he just lost his job. At this point we were a single income household with 2 young children 5 and 2 years old. I talked with my wife and we decided unprompted to lower his rent \$200 a month until he got back on his feet. Six months later in April he was able to have things figured out. These tenants have resided in our property for the past 13 years and we hope they never leave. In 13 years their rent has gone up a total of \$100, this equates to 0.62% per year. Their rent is \$700 per month below 80% AMI. In fact all of our tenants are SEVERAL SEVERAL hundred dollars below 80% AMI. To reiterate, small property owners like us are not the problem.

In my property that falls under ETPA we have a 20 year tenant that lives alone in a large 2 bedroom \$600 below 80% AMI. We did not evict her to increase profits, we had planned to make an adjustment when she moved on. I don't see how this is greedy. Another 30 year tenant in this building is a retired school janitor and Navy veteran. His rent is \$815 below 80% AMI. Please tell me how I am being greedy. I have used the 80% AMI as this has been considered affordable rent to illustrate how low my rents are and how they favor tenants in need.

Please see the attached letter from Lee Brown a previous tenant that lived in our property for 7 years with no rent increase.

As I requested at the October 25, 2022 RGB public hearing, please keep property owners like my wife and I in mind when making the rent decisions and that no one had to tell us to be empathetic with the people that live in our property. I know that several small property owners are of the same mindset.

Thank you,
Andrew and Julie Stavropoulos

June 29, 2014

Dear Best Landlord's I have EVER had,

I'm sorry to say that we will be leaving by August 1st. I have really enjoyed living here.

This is a great house and I'm going to miss the neighborhood. There are some things I have to try to take care of, so living south of here will be more convenient. I suppose I will be hearing from you soon.

Lee

Julie + Andy -

All the best to you + your family. Thanks, Amy

June 16, 2023

Via electronic mail

City of Kingston Rent Guidelines Board
420 Broadway
Kingston, New York 12401

RE: Guideline rates for rent adjustments for tenant leases in ETPA Buildings, October 1, 2023 and September 30, 2024

My name is Jen Benson and am A member of the Mid-Hudson Valley DSA and am a resident of and am a tenant in midtown Kingston. Mid-Hudson Valley DSA is a member-led, democratic political and activist organization, fighting for systemic changes that empower working people. Our chapter covers Ulster, Dutchess, and Orange Counties in Mid-Hudson Valley.

To begin, I would like to thank the Rent Guidelines Board for voting in favor of a rent reduction for tenants in ETPA buildings last year. I hope to see a positive outcome in court, and the enactment of the negative rent reduction.

I am writing to voice my support for a rent freeze for tenant leases in ETPA buildings for October 1, 2023 to September 30, 2024. As a tenant in midtown Kingston, I have experienced the difficulties of finding safe and affordable housing in the city - as have my friends, colleagues, and neighbors.

As an organizer with MHVSDA and a volunteer on Sarahana Strhetha's campaign for NYS Assembly and now for Charlotte Lloyd's campaign for Common Council, I have knocked on hundreds of doors in the City of Kingston, and have heard countless stories of the challenges ever increasing rents are creating for the middle and working class people in our community. Cost of living, and specifically rental costs have been the most predominant issue facing our neighbors across Kingston. Our neighbors have had to make choices like choosing between paying electricity bills or paying rent - with many considering leaving Kingston and Ulster County due to unaffordable rents and a tight housing supply.

Knocking doors in Kingston over the last two years has made one thing clear - working people and tenants in Kingston are facing unaffordable rent from uptown to midtown to the Rondout, and Sarahana's victory demonstrates people are ready for change.

While canvassing last June I spoke with a community member who's rent has risen significantly the last few years, and both the community member and their partner were forced to take on second jobs to make ends meet and to be able to pay their rent. The cascading impacts of drastically increasing rents did not end there - they then faced increasing childcare costs to ensure their children were taken care of while they worked their second jobs. **The reality is clear: long-time residents and families are being priced out of Kingston.**

The Rent Guidelines Board has a critical opportunity to stand up for tenants and families across the city by enacting a rent freeze for the period under consideration, October 1, 2023 and September 30, 2024. Rents at current levels are unsustainable for many who live in this community - and they should not have to choose between paying for rent or for groceries or childcare - we must fight for our neighbors, and not for financial gain of corporate landlords.

Sincerely,
Jen Benson
Ulster County Co-Chair
Mid Hudson Valley DSA
297 Hasbrouck Avenue
Kingston, NY 1240

hcr.sm.KingstonRGB

From: Jonathan Bix <[REDACTED]@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, June 16, 2023 2:08 PM
To: hcr.sm.KingstonRGB
Subject: My Personal Comment for June 17 Rent Guidelines Board hearing

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My name is Jonathan Bix, I'm a homeowner that's lived at 16 Josephine Ave for four years. I support the board's previous decision to reduce rents, and given the current legal situation I believe the Rent Guidelines Board must keep rents frozen. The value of owners' buildings in Kingston has continued to go up, but regular people's incomes have not. A rent freeze is the only fair choice for the board to make.

hcr.sm.KingstonRGB

From: Paul Mersfelder [REDACTED] >
Sent: Friday, June 16, 2023 2:12 PM
To: hcr.sm.KingstonRGB
Subject: Public Comment for the 6/17 RGB hearing

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To the Kingston Rent Guidelines Board:

My name's Paul Mersfelder. I live at 168 Washington Ave. in Kingston, NY and have been a homeowner and landlord here since 2017. I'm incredibly frustrated that Kingston landlords have blocked the recent 15% rent reduction for over 6 months now with their lawsuit. As a landlord I fully support the rent reduction.

Landlords' talking point that a 15% rent reduction would not allow them to earn a living simply doesn't add up. I rent out a 1 bedroom apartment (with a full kitchen, bath, and good sized living room and dining room) for \$800 dollars a month. At that rate I'm able to cover taxes on the property, regular maintenance, and earn a modest income.

I understand that rate is not achievable for many small landlords whose primary income comes from their property. BUT my tenants have all come to me saying the going rate for a similar apartment would be TWICE that. It simply doesn't add up that even small landlords would suffer from this rate decrease given the current market and it DEFINITELY doesn't make sense that the large corporations that typically manage the buildings regulated by ETPA would be unable to make a profit. Any claims to the contrary strike me as bad faith arguments motivated by greed.

We will have to wait and see the outcome of that case. Until the rent reduction is restored, I strongly urge the Rent Guidelines Board to keep rents frozen. All of my tenants have come to me in the midst of personal housing crisis. Families who live and work here ALREADY can't afford the rent. We simply can't have any more increases if we're going to maintain the character of our city.

Please let me know if you have any questions and thank you for reading my statement!

Sincerely,
Paul Mersfelder



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